



CRITIQUING A CRITIQUE: SHAYKH SA'ĪD FOUDAH ON IBN TAYMIYYA AND LOGIC¹

Translated by: S. Abdul Aziz

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Ibn Taymiyya said:

As for the books of logic, they do not contain knowledge that is commanded in the Sacred Law—even if the independent reasoning [*ijtihād*] of some people have led them [to the view] that it [learning logic] is communally obligatory [*farḍ kifāya*]. Some people have stated that the sciences are not established save with it—as was stated by Abū Ḥāmid [al-Ghazālī]—and this is an gross error both rationally [*‘aqlan*] and legally [*shar‘an*].

As for [it being a gross error] rationally, then all of the people of intellect [*‘uqalā’*] among the children of Ādam from all factions that speak regarding knowledge have formulated their sciences without Greek logic. As for [it being a gross error] legally, then it is known by necessity from the religion of Islam that Allah has not obligated upon the people of knowledge and faith that they learn this Greek logic.

As for it in itself, some of it is truth and some of it is false. Much or most of the truth found within it is not needed, and the amount within it that is needed; most sound dispositions [*fiṭra*] possess it independently [*tastaqillu bihi*]. The dolt does not benefit from it and the intelligent one

¹ Summarized from *Tad ‘īm al-Manṭiq (In Support of Logic)*, Shaykh Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Foudah (pg 47-56) Dār al-Rāzī.

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does not need it. Its harms for the one who is not well acquainted with the sciences of the Prophets is greater than its benefit, for it contains of such negative principles [*qawā'id salbiyya*] that found an audience with many virtuous people and was a cause for their hypocrisy and the corruption of their knowledge. The statement of he who said that all of it is true is false speech. On the contrary, their words regarding 'term' [*ḥadd*], attributes of self [*al-ṣifāt al-dhātīyya*] and accidents, and the categories of analogy and argument and its modes, contain such corruption that we have clarified in other works besides this; and this was clarified by the scholars of the Muslims.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. Ibn Taymiyya's claim that the books of logic do not contain knowledge that is commanded in the Sacred Law

Ibn Taymiyya claimed that the books of logic do not contain knowledge that is commanded in the Sacred Law. The context of his words indicates generality. We know that the Sacred Law commands with everything that contains benefit and interest for man—either in his creed or works. If we assume for arguments sake that the science of logic does not contain knowledge that is commanded with in the Sacred Law at all, then this means that there is absolutely nothing in logic that can be of benefit for people in their worldly and religious life. This conclusion is inferred from his [Ibn Taymiyya's] expression, and it is false for the following reasons:

A. His agreement with analogy:

Ibn Taymiyya himself said elsewhere: “as for the mode of argument [*al-burhān*], then its conception is a correct conception. If its propositions are correct; there

is no doubt that it benefits knowledge.” Here, he explicitly stated that the formulation of syllogisms mentioned in the science of logic is correct, and that if its propositions are correct, then there is no doubt that analogy benefits sound knowledge. It is known rationally and in the Sacred Law that whatever serves as a path to correct knowledge is itself legally commanded or at the very least allowed, so it is not permissible to say that some correct paths that lead to knowledge are not commanded with in the Sacred Law or that they are not allowed.

So, what is observed here is that Ibn Taymiyya contradicted himself. In reality, the fact that analogy is completely valid is something agreed upon by all people of intellect. For that reason, they agreed with it and encouraged others to teach it so as to take benefit from it. The only reason we have presented the words of Ibn Taymiyya here is in order to illustrate his invalid premises that he mentioned in opposition to the science of logic

B. His own admittance to the validity of most of what the logicians have established:

Ibn Taymiyya said elsewhere in his critique of logic and the works of logic: “This is a subject that a believer must be certain in and know; that these people and others only went astray predominantly because of what they negated and denied; not because of what they affirmed and knew.”[*Majmū‘a al-Fatāwā*: 9/261]

Here, we see that Ibn Taymiyya admitted that what is mentioned in the books of logic are two matters: what the logicians affirmed and established, and what they negated. He testified that most of what they affirmed was in fact correct, however he opposed them and claimed that they were in error concerning what they negated. That being said, then according to him, some of what is mentioned in the books of logic is correct and some is incorrect. If this is the case, how was it then possible for him to claim that the books of logic do not contain knowledge that is commanded with in the Sacred Law, whereas we know that we have been commanded in the Sacred Law to know the correct means of reaching knowledge?

2. His objection to Imām al-Ghazālī's statement that logic is the basis for all sciences

Ibn Taymiyya objected to Imām al-Ghazālī's statement that logic is the basis of all sciences. Ibn Taymiyya claimed that this statement is known to be false both rationally and legally...here we shall analyze his own logical and legal inference establishing this, and then we shall critique it:

A. Ibn Taymiyya's logical inference proving the incorrectness of al-Ghazālī's words

The sum of this inference is his claim that all of the people of intellect have formulated their sciences without Greek logic. This—if correct—implies that there is no real need for logic. This claim is a gross error for the following reasons:

- Aristotle was from the people of intellect and he formulated his sciences based upon the logic that he developed.
- Ibn Taymiyya himself admitted in his own books that many of the theologians were influenced by Greek logic and that they formulated the contents of their books based upon it, such as: al-Abhurī, al-Rāzī, al-Kātibī, al-Āmidī, and others. If that was not the case, then why did Ibn Taymiyya expend so much effort in refuting the science of logic, and why did he expend so much in explaining the errors that one may fall into if he relies upon it? If there was no one who formulated their science based upon logic then what motivated all the refutations?
- It is known that many of the philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārābī, and Ibn Mulk formulated their sciences and philosophies based upon logic.
- Ibn Taymiyya claimed that some people said that all of logic is true. If his citation is in fact true, then it establishes that they relied upon logic in formulating the contents of their books

If Ibn Taymiyya meant that the people of intellect did not study the exact same books of logic authored by the Greeks, and that despite this, they were able to formulate their sciences, then it should be known that we do not intend those exact same books...we are only speaking about the principles of logic; be they mentioned in the books or not. It is known that the Muslims wrote a large collection of books on logic and it is known by necessity that a huge number of people have relied upon these books in learning the sciences. We do not need—and nor was it needed in Ibn Taymiyya's time for that matter—to read the exact same books of the Greeks in order to become acquainted with the principles of logic. We are able to suffice ourselves with perusing and reading the books formulated by the scholars of the Muslims on that topic. For this reason, we are able to debate and critique the sciences of others based upon the same principles of logic without needing to refer back to the ancient works of the Greeks.

If Ibn Taymiyya meant that all of the people of intellect were free of needing the principles of logic mentioned by the scholars in their books, and that along with this, they were able to formulate their sciences, then this is false by necessity. The falsehood of this can be proven by referring back to Ibn Taymiyya's own words in which he said that some of what is contained in the book of logic is completely correct.

B. Ibn Taymiyya's legal inference supporting his stance: claiming that learning the science of logic was not commanded by Allah, the Exalted

This itself is a type of fallacious reasoning that Ibn Taymiyya would have been unable to write, were it not that he relied upon the modes of fallacious reasoning mentioned and warned against by the logicians. To clarify this:

- If Ibn Taymiyya intended that Allah did not textually state that it is obligatory to learn Greek logic, and because of this, it is therefore unlawful and learning it is false because there is no Divine text to support it, then this is completely false because it is well known that the point of contention

is not in reading the actual works of the Greeks, rather it is in the benefit found in the principles mentioned in the books of logic—be they found in the words of the Greeks or other than them. It is not permissible to declare something unlawful or impermissible merely because there is no explicit Divine text stating that it is obligatory and naming it by its name and particular. Its legality may be inferred from the generality of evidence or an analogy between it and something similar to it; it is not necessary that there be an explicit detailed text for it.

- If Ibn Taymiyya was of the belief that it is not obligatory or allowed to learn something unless there is an explicit Divine text stating so and calling it by its name, then this is also completely false. Such a belief entails cancellation of the commands of the Sacred Law and its generalities and an invalidation of analogy. The sum of Ibn Taymiyya's inference here is [as if he is saying]: 'I do not believe in the legality of learning Greek logic unless there is an explicit text in the Islamic Sacred Law saying: 'Learning Greek logic is allowed'. Since there is no such text in the Sacred Law, learning Greek logic is not allowed.' This is false because it is known that focus is placed not upon the name 'logic' or that it is attributed to the Greeks or others, rather focus is placed on whether or not these principles mentioned in the books of logic benefit knowledge or not.
- Ibn Taymiyya's words are fallacious because he said: "Allah did not obligate learning this Greek logic..." In other words, his view was that since the Sacred Law did not command the learning of Greek logic, then it follows that it did not command the learning of logic at all. This is a clear fallacy. Not a single scholar claimed that in the Sacred Law, learning logic is commanded *because* it is Greek logic. Anyone who makes such a claim is a liar and fabricator against the Sacred Law. I know of no one who has claimed this, and the fact that Ibn Taymiyya negates this makes it seem as if there are some who actually believe that.
- If Ibn Taymiyya agrees with us—at the very least—that some of the principles mentioned in logic are sound and lead to sound knowledge, then

it is not permissible for him to oppose us in saying that learning its principles are—at the very least—allowed. For him to oppose this is to oppose the Sacred Law itself. The apparent meaning of his words indicates that he believes that there is nothing correct in the science of logic that is commanded in the Sacred Law.

3. Logic; some of it is sound and some of it is false

Ibn Taymiyya said that in itself, logic contains both truth and falsehood: “As for it in itself, some of it is truth and some of it is false.” The meaning of this phrase “it in itself” refers to its reality and essence [*māhiya*] by which it is what it is. The reality of logic is that it is a collection of principles and rules that, if followed, enable a person to avoid mistakes in his thought process. This is the meaning of logic “in itself”, so this being the case, it is in no way allowed to say that some of it is sound and some of it is false *in itself*. On the contrary, whatever is like that “in itself”, then it is completely valid and is in complete accordance with the Sacred Law and is completely legal.

That is with regards to logic in itself. As for logic inasmuch as it is a collection of principles recorded in books, or with reference to a particular book of logic, then we are not able to say that everything in it is sound. It is possible that it might contain errors, but this is not what we call “logic in itself”. For example, if you said: “Islam in itself is the truth”, you would be completely correct. If, on the other hand, some scholars wrote on Islam, you are not able to say that all of what they wrote is completely correct because it is possible that it doesn’t express Islam “in itself”.

4. The falsehood found in the books of logic

Ibn Taymiyya outlined the falsehood in the books of logic saying that it is almost all to be found in negation. So [according to this] most of what the logicians established is sound, yet some of what they negated is false. This is the reality of Ibn Taymiyya's view, however he says here that "Much or most of the truth found within it is not needed." This view of his is not completely accepted like this. If he intended that that most of the people—which includes the commonality—in their pursuit of knowledge, do not need the majority of the details found in logic, then this might be accepted from him. On the other hand, if he intended that most of the people do not need the universals of logic, then this is false. If he intended that most of the people do not need logic most of the time, then this view is in need of some detail. The specialists in rational sciences are always in need of it and its details. As for others among the commonality, it is possible that they only need some of its universals. On the other hand, if we were to investigate the reality, we might find that the commonality use logical principles all the time, without them having studied it in any books.

5. The dolt does not benefit from it and the intelligent one does not need it

Ibn Taymiyya said: "...and the amount within it that is needed; most sound dispositions [*fiṭra*] possess it independently [*tastaqillu bihi*]. The dolt does not benefit from it and the intelligent one does not need it." This is fallacious reasoning as we shall explain.

...If he meant that the sound dispositions are in no need of learning logic from the books, we respond by saying that the logical principles written in the books are not to be called logic in itself—as we explained earlier—rather, they are a written form and expression of logic. In itself, logic is the collection of principles that man uses during his thought process; not restricted to their presence in books or in man's memory. So how can Ibn Taymiyya claim that the sound dispositions independently possess it?

If Ibn Taymiyya meant that when thinking, the disposition [*fiṭra*] does not rely upon the principles mentioned in the books of logic, then the majority of intelligent people would contradict that claim. As for his claim that: “**The dolt does not benefit from it and the intelligent one does not need it**”, this is not completely accepted. If a dolt were to apply himself and repeat it within his self, logic would become entrenched within him and he would be able to bring it to mind and benefit from it. This is what scholars call ‘acquired intelligence’. If we say that these principles are true in and of themselves, it is not allowed to claim that the dolt will not benefit from them if he takes to learning them.

In addition to this, it is not allowed to say that the intelligent one does not need it, for this would imply that an intelligent person never makes a mistake. There is not to be found any intelligent person who has never made a mistake—much less numerous mistakes. No one besides the Prophets are immune from error, and the Prophets were made immune by Allah, the Exalted. So, if we agree that there is no intelligent person, save that he makes mistakes, how then can this intelligent person be shown his mistakes without following general principles by which he may ascertain the meanings of what he says and thinks and employ those principles to discipline his thoughts? These principles are taken from his sound mind and are in themselves logic.

This implies therefore, that both the intelligent and the dolt are in need of the science of logic, not to mention the various grades of people in between the two. This invalidates the words of Ibn Taymiyya.

For the intelligent to be in no need of these principles implies that he is either not in need of the necessary qualities of his inner disposition [*fiṭra*]*—*at least according to Ibn Taymiyya’s belief*—*or that he is not in need of a portion of it. Nay, this belief implies that the intelligent person has no need for any principles whatsoever, and this is incorrect.

6. The corruption that results from logic

As for Ibn Taymiyya's claim that corruption results from logic, this is incorrect. On the contrary, it is possible that someone call fall into many errors no matter who they are—not just because they studied logic. Nay, many errors came from those who were closer to the science of Ḥadīth. Many of them carried beliefs of anthropomorphism and possessed corrupt creed. It is not to be said that the reason they fell into those errors was because of their study of Ḥadīth, rather, it is because of their own weak thoughts and simple minded understanding of its meanings. So, having said this, if those who specialize in the science of logic fall into errors, it is not to be said that their knowledge of logic is the cause of this. The reason for such errors is their own weakness in using its principles.

7. The claim of some that all of it is true

As for his words that some claim that all of it is true, if the alleged speaker of those words meant logic in an of itself—as we mentioned earlier—then he is correct. The sum of his statement would thus be: 'Every correct principle used in the process of thinking is itself true.' If, on the other hand, this alleged speaker meant that everything found in the books of logic is correct, then this is false. Up till now, I know of no one who has ever said this. When Ibn Taymiyya refuted the one who allegedly said that, it seemed to imply that some people have actually said it. If that was the case, it was his—or one of his followers—responsibility to clarify who that person was, otherwise, his words are nothing more than claims without proof.

